General Translation Theory as both Macro & Micro-level Theories: A Bird's Eye View, An Updated Version, 2025

Theory is often defined as a statement of a relationship between variables. General translation theory is often considered to address both macro-level and micro-level aspects of translation, but not as a grand theory. All the above theories are much relevant to the levels of analysis as part of sociology. Thus the general translation theory explores the broader context of translation, including the purpose of the translation Skopos theory, cultural and social factors, and the overall effect on the target audience. It also delves into the specifics of language and text, examining individual words, sentence structures, and stylistic choices.

Micro level refers to those translation techniques which are applied for short textual segments and are usually of a prescriptive nature. Meanwhile, the macro level refers to translation strategies as well as external factors that influence the decisions made by a translator and are of a descriptive nature. To make it clearer, the micro-level is more relevant to the linguistic theory of translation, while the macro-level is more relevant to the functional theory of translation. For example, the translation of a Qur'anic idiom like المؤلفة قلوبهم in the Qur'anic verse "إنما الصدقات للفقراء والمساكين والعاملين عليها والمؤلفة قلوبهم" verse no. 60 of Surat Al –Tawbah or "Repentance," is rendered as "the recently converted to Islam," according to the functional theory of translation, though it is also sometimes put as "those whose hearts to be reconciled," in accordance with the linguistic theory of translation.

To sum up, some translations mingle the two approaches together translating the above Qur'anic idiom as "those who have recently converted to Islam whose hearts are to be reconciled," which is an expression that hits the nail on its head. Accordingly, the macro-level deals with external factors influencing translations and their manifestation in translation theories including Scopus theory by Vermeer, Holz-Mantari's translatorial action, Appiah's thick translation, and the poststructuralist and functionalist approaches, pointing out the reasons for the shift of theories from source-oriented to target-oriented, namely from a semantic-based translation like the approach adopted in ancient times to a communicative-based translation in the modern era.

Accordingly, the focus of a macro-level is on the overall strategy, purpose, and context of translation and it is exemplified in Skopos theory, namely the purpose of the translation, and functionalist approaches, and how cultural and social factors influence translation choices. As for the scope of a macro-level, it considers the big picture, including the intended audience, the function of the text, and the overall effect of the translation.

Conversely, the focus of micro-level is examining the details of the source and target texts, including language, grammar, and style and it is exemplified in linguistic analysis, lexical choices, syntactic structures, and how these elements are transferred in the translation. Regarding the scope of a micro-level, it analyzes the specific words, sentences, and stylistic features of the text.

However, there is interplay between macro and micro-level theories of translation as many translation theories acknowledge that both approaches are interconnected and

influence each other. Meanwhile, a good translation often requires both the overall purpose and context, namely the macro-level, combined with the specific linguistic and stylistic choices, namely the micro level.
For example, a translator might need to adjust sentence structure, namely the micro-level, in order to convey the intended meaning and tone of a text in accordance with the macro level.

Meanwhile, the general translation theory is banished from the world a "grand theory," which is exclusively reserved to some scientific theories only. This is justified by a fact translation studies have developed various theories, but none of them are globally accepted as a comprehensive and all-encompassing explanation of translation across all contexts.

There are several reasons behind this banishment including the diversity of translation as a complex process involving different text types, languages, and cultural contexts, making it difficult to create a single, unified theory that covers everything.

The second reason is the evolving nature of the translation theory with new perspectives and approaches always emerging. Consequently, this ongoing evolvement makes it challenging to establish a static, overarching theory for the translation.

The third reason is the focus of the theories of translation on some specific aspects such as equivalence, functionalism like Skopos theory, or cultural adaptation including domestication and foreignization, rather than attempting to explain all aspects of translation.
Instead of a single "grand theory," translation studies encompass a range of theoretical frameworks, each with its own strengths and limitations.
First, there are the linguistic theories, which are the oldest kind of translation theories as they primarily focus on the linguistic aspects of translation like equivalence and grammatical structures.
Second, there are the functional theories of translation which emphasize the purpose and function of the translated text and these theories are exemplified in Skopos theory as a case in point. For example, the Arabic phrase "إنتبه لخطوتك" is translated, in accordance with a functional theory in the context of subway commutations as "Mind the gap," while it is translated in a usual context as "Watch your step."
Third, there are the cultural theories of translation which gives a prominence to the cultural context and the impact of translation on the target culture. For example, in the west the children use to say during Halloween "trick or treat," as they go from door to door in a neighborhood to ask for treats with the implied threat of playing tricks on those who refuse. However, this Halloween idiomatic phrase could be translated in accordance with the parlance of the Holy Month of Ramadan in Egypt as "إدونا العادة".

Fourth, there are the literary theories of translation which deal with the translation of literary works, and they are often regarded as the hazardous business of translation because they involve subjective interpretation and aesthetic considerations and out from this point of view had stemmed the stereotypical, though often-pseudo, Latin proverb " Translator is a traitor."

Regarding the literary theories of translation, I would like the reader to ponder on the translation of the following phrase from English into Arabic: "It's much like a beggar's mantle fringed with gold," and in Arabic, it goes like this: " ما أشبهها بخرقة بالية حواشيها من الذهب." Then, I would like the reader to wonder with me "Alas! How the transformer of such elegance could be called a traitor!"
The above-mentioned diverse theories of translation contribute to a rich and evolving understanding of translation that may in the future develop into a "Choate," theory which, it is hoped, would finally fit as a "grand theory of translation."

Eventually, I would like to give some background information on macro-level, micro-level, and mid-level theories as they represent different scopes of analysis in social sciences. Macro-level theories focus on large-scale social structures and systems, like institutions and whole societies. Micro-level theories concentrate on individual interactions and small-scale social phenomena. Mid-level theories, also known as mid-range theories, bridge the gap by focusing on specific social phenomena and offering testable explanations within a limited scope.
Meanwhile, macro-level theories examine large-scale phenomena such as the social structures which are relevant to how societies are organized and the roles of institutions like the government, education system, or economy. They are also deal with social systems in relation to the interconnectedness of different parts of society and how they function as a whole. The macro-level analysis does also focus on the large-scale social processes as to how societies change over time, including processes like industrialization, globalization, or social movements.

The macro-level theories are exemplified in the structural functionalism as a theory which views society as complex system with interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability.
They are also exemplified in the conflict theory which focuses on power dynamics and inequality in society, highlighting how different groups compete for resources and social status.
Further, the macro-level analysis is exemplified by the world-systems theory which analyzes the global economy as a single capitalist system with core, semi-periphery and periphery nations.
Conversely, the micro-level theories do focus on the individual behavior as to how individuals think, feel, and act in social situations. They also deal with face-to-face interactions as to how people communicate and interact in everyday situations. Finally, the micro-level analysis tackles the small-group dynamics as to how individuals behave in small groups and how these groups are organized.
The micro-level theories are exemplified in the symbolic interactionism which is a theory emphasizing how people create meaning through social interaction and the use of symbols. There is also the social exchange theory which suggests that social behavior is based on the exchange of rewards and costs between individuals.
Finally, regarding mid-level or mid-range theories, they more specific as they focus on a particular social phenomenon or area of social life, rather than trying to explain everything at once. The mid-level analysis is also more testable as it is often formulated in a way that allows for empirical testing and verification through research. Further, this

level of analysis is more useful as it can be applied to practical problems and inform interventions in specific social contexts.
The mid-level theories are exemplified in the reference group theory which examines how people compare themselves to others and how these comparisons influence their attitude and behaviors.
They are exemplified in the social learning theory which suggests that people learn behaviors by observing and imitating others. Further, this level of analysis is exemplified in the social disorganization theory which explores the factors that contribute to crime and deviance in communities.

In a nutshell, the key difference distinguishing these levels of theory lies in their scope of analysis with the macro-level theories looking at the big picture, micro-level theories focusing on the individual, and mid-level theories aiming to explain specific social phenomena within a more limited range.

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